"Deeds that Challenge Protestant Christianity"

The Declaration of the Committee on Observation and Recommendations at the Congress on the Purpose and Methods of Inter-Church Federations

Pittsburgh, Pa. October 1-4, 1917

THE Pittsburgh Congress marks a definite stage in the progress of Christian co-operation. At the opening session each of the denominational groups elected a committee-man from their number to carefully review the reports presented, listen to the discussions and interpret the purpose, spirit and actions of the Congress.

The accompanying statement conveys the deep impression which was made upon those who were present. Still more it points the way to realization in every community of the splendid hopes which brought the delegates together from all parts of the United States.

The reports which were submitted to the Congress, now revised according to the discussions, will be printed as a practical manual for the use of those who are sincerely interested in Christian co-operation.

COMMISSION ON INTER-CHURCH FEDERATIONS
OF THE FEDERAL COUNCIL OF THE
CHURCHES OF CHRIST IN AMERICA
105 East Twenty-second Street, New York City

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THE REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON OBSERVATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Congress was composed of 506 Delegates from 134 towns and cities, in 36 states representing 31 religious bodies. The members of the Congress are connected with local federations, and with numerous general agencies for the promotion of the kingdom of God. The meetings were pervaded by the spirit of seriousness, fraternity, devotion, and enthusiasm for the triumph of Christian ideals. The sessions were characterized by dignity, businesslike procedure, frankness in the expression of opinion, and brotherly love. All these features of the Congress are evidences of the guidance and dominance of the Holy Spirit.

PURPOSES OF THE CONGRESS

The delegates to this Congress represented the Commission on Inter-Church Federations of the Federal Council of churches of Christ in America and were from

I. State, County and Local Federations.
II. Ministerial Associations.
III. Constituent Bodies of the Federal Council of the Church of Christ in America.
IV. Executive Committee of the Federal Council.
V. Commissioners of the Federal Council.
VI. Organizations Engaged in Interdenominational and Undenominational Christian Work.
VII. Members of the Men and Religion Forward Movement Teams.
VIII. Individuals Especially Interested in Inter-Church Work.

The discussions were based upon reports of subcommissions on the following topics:

I. Principles and Methods of Organization.
II. Community Evangelism.
III. World Evangelism.
IV. Religious Education.
V. Social Service.
VI. Church Comity.
VII. International Justice and Goodwill.
VIII. Religious Publicity.
IX. Special Report on War-Time Inter-Church Work.

The purposes of the Congress were:

I. To recognize the increasing need of co-operation, felt in all communities and denominations.
II. To assemble the evidence that this co-operation is actually taking place, either with or without promotive or directive effort. Throughout the land ministers are meeting together, and Christians are praying and working together. Thirty-one cities now have federations of churches with salaried executives. A new function has been created in the service of paid secretaries of local federations.
III. To interpret the relation of this spirit of co-operation to the outstanding activities of the churches locally and for the advancement of the kingdom of God throughout the world.
IV. To consider seriously the opportunities and the duties which compel co-operation and the deepening of the spirit of oneness in the tremendous emergency created by the war. The necessity for the union of all Christian energies, though it was felt in the vision of the normal tasks of the churches before the war, has been acutely emphasized by the colossal struggle in which we are now engaged.
V. To assemble, digest. and put into accessible form for use everywhere, a record of the experiences of those who have been engaged in co-operative work in their several communities.

PERSPECTIVE OF THE CONGRESS

It should not be forgotten that the Congress was no new, sudden nor hurried gathering made under stress of the needs and dangers brought to light by the war. Behind the meeting is a long history. For many years evangelical alliances composed of pastors in many centers, have been considering their common problems. The church federation idea has been slowly but continuously unfolding until it has expressed itself in many ways, religious, philanthropic, educational, missionary and civic. The unifying grace of love for our Lord Jesus Christ has been fusing hearts, bringing varieties of vision to a common focus, and organizing scattered energies for the achievement of purposes cherished with equal enthusiasm by all true followers of the Master.

The Commissions whose reports have been presented, with the exception of that on "War-Time Inter-Church Work," were appointed nearly a year ago. The gathering was but a climax to a series of expressions of the desire of all who love the kingdom of God, and believe that its dominance in human affairs is the only salvation for the world, to join their resources in the mighty effort to enthrone Jesus Christ as King over human life.

This movement has slowly extended into states, cities, counties, and rural districts. It has found itself in the establishment of numerous local federations, and where, because of financial limitations, their formation seemed impossible, it has appeared in the growth of the spirit of unity, and in efforts by neighboring churches to share their common tasks, as far as was possible under existing conditions.

At this hour the war has stimulated the consciousness of the need keenly felt alike by all Christians. The Red Cross movement, the calls of hunger from lands across the sea, the cry of nakedness for clothing, of sickness for ministration, of bereavement, poverty,

and pain of many kinds for human sympathy, appeal to Christians with even more power than to those who make no profession of discipleship to our Lord. Again, from our homes and churches have gone thousands from the flower of our young manhood to fight, and hundreds of the most beautiful spirits of our young womanhood to serve in the sweet ministry of nursing.

Moreover, the utter subversion of ideals of brotherhood by the tragedy of war has served to develop keenly a new appreciation of the fraternity contemplated by our Master. Thus the appeal of human need, the experience of sacrifice in the gift of our own youth to a great cause, and the quickened sense of fraternity, have conspired to stimulate in our churches the desire for unity in Christian service. With this has come the deepened conviction that hesitation in its practical expression would be sinful in the sight of God. Is the isolated church able to meet these demands? The answer is patent. Only the united resources of the churches can make adequate response.

Furthermore, the program of the church for its future is vitally involved. Changed conditions are inevitable after the war. Undoubtedly, in many respects, the altered situation will be startling. We must face the revolutionary nature of the forces that are now at work. Who dreams that the millions of young men and women who will unflinchingly face the struggle, who have answered the call for self-giving to the uttermost, who will grow wiser by virtue of international contacts, who will catch world visions because of their expanded experiences, can return to their homes, unchanged by the tremendous events in which they are participating? Either the church must meet the issues of the times, or our transformed youth will bring back from their martial schooling contempt for an easy life of conventional religious activities that merely mark time, for energies without objective, and for a spirit that shrinks from gripping the mightiest tasks in the full confidence of victory.

These heroes and heroines will have spheres and places of influence all over our land, as with glad hearts we, who unfortunately have been prevented from sharing their activity, welcome those who may be permitted to return. It is inevitable that they will bring with them ideals, convictions, visions, and methods, which will either transform the communities to which they belong, or will force them to abandon connection with communions and institutions that fail to respond to the development they have experienced. It is a time for calm and hopeful consideration of the situation, for undisturbed confidence in the outcome, and for the wisest efforts to anticipate the unescapable results of the war upon life throughout our land and the world.

The Congress is to be congratulated upon its atmosphere of serene faith in God and the finality of the ideals of Jesus. It was marked by the absence of any manifestation of fear or panic in facing the future. We belong to the Church of the *Living God*, and where he leads through his providences, we dare to follow fearlessly.

IDEALS OF FEDERATION

It is important that we keep clearly before us, without confusion, the ideals of Federation. Without doubt there are many earnest Christians who fear the word and the idea. They imagine that its purpose is to annihilate denominations, to foster indifference to venerated church traditions, to slacken the grip of religious conviction upon the human heart, to compromise adherence to standards of faith, or to cause the strong colors of church banners to fade into the neutral grey of indifference to truth. All these fears are groundless. Those who composed the Congress are learning the royal grace of love for one another, and the fraternal virtue of serving with one another, with no abatement whatsoever of attachment to the several groups of Christians with which they are connected.

Neither the Congress nor any federation has authority of any kind over any denomination or local church. Federation is not a disturber of theological standards or church usages. We must all be free to express our convictions of truth. Federation does not set aside any activities now in use, nor would it modify such agencies as have been found efficient in Christian service. It does not propose to ignore any worthy Christian movement. It is comprehensive, not exclusive; it is all-including, not selective. Every ecclesiastical, missionary, philanthropic, educational and social agency that has demonstrated its worthfulness, is gladly welcomed into the combination of forces that seek to glorify God by the enthronement of the Spirit of Christ in human life.

Federation must be honest, and has no wish to claim credit for work it does not do. It does not aim to create new instruments, nor to build institutions in rivalry of those now effective, nor will it violate Christian economy by the attempt to duplicate existing machinery. It seeks rather to promote the spirit of cooperation between organizations already existing, to correlate forces now productive, and to foster a conservation that will prevent waste of time, energy, and money, and abolish frictions, jealousies and unseemly strife.

In short, Federation aims to unify existing Christian forces for the service of the kingdom of God.

Therefore, the cause of Federation is not to be advanced by shallow denunciation of denominational loyalty, but by deepening the sense of loyalty to all that is best in denominational history and effort. No strong combination can be made of weak units. The body of Jesus Christ demands the full strength of every part. It will be efficient in virtue of that which every joint supplies.

WHAT FEDERATION IS DOING

The reports of all commissions were prepared by experts. The volume containing the proceedings of the Congress will contain the best experiences of efficient workers in their several spheres. It will give the results of federated service, and will make sugges-

tions which each locality can use as its peculiar circumstances indicate. Experience has demonstrated that the most important activities of churches become more effective through federation. We call upon the members of the Congress, and Christians everywhere to promote the distribution of the volume in the interest of Christian achievement.

The reports agree in some important features:

I. The necessity of intelligent and consecrated leadership. Never so much as now did the interests of the kingdom of God depend upon the vision, enthusiasm, wide-mindedness and sacrificial devotion of pastors. As never before we are experiencing and rejoicing in the increasing activity of devoted laymen, some of whom are known throughout the world because of their remarkable service.

II. The necessity of using all the resources of the local churches. Laymen with their acute sense of conditions, and their fruitful inventiveness in mastering these must be enlisted more generally than ever before. The limitless power of consecrated womanhood is more appreciated than ever. Woman's loving heart, her sacrificial spirit, her busy fingers, her tireless body, her gracious influences, must be increasingly utilized.

III. The vanity of isolated effort to meet the tremendous needs that are upon us. This will intensify the problems of the changed conditions we are shortly to face. Shall the Church of God in a given territory be an archipelago, the shores of whose islands are beaten by the surf of a separating sea? Shall love for Christ, shown in the spirit of Christian service to men, build isthmuses that change this dividing ocean into peaceful lagoons over which the commerce of fraternity and united service shall ply, and realize the prophecy "And the sea is no more"? Shall the continental spirit of united loyalty to Christ displace the insular pride of separatism?

IV. The desirability of the co-operation of local churches and church federations with general public movements whose activities are related to the kingdom of God. So far as the spirit of service has been institutionalized by public agencies, we should cordially join with them. Local civic movements for community betterment, or for participation in nation-wide moral ideals often stand for the very things the churches should represent. When citizens of a community unite to uplift localities and the world, those who belong to the Christian order of life should share their ideals. Our citizenship is in heaven, but this does not mean that we shall ignore the earth. It means that we shall heavenize the world.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend:—

I. That all churches support more generously than ever their own local work, and the missionary, philanthropic and educational interests with which they are identified. These normal and fundamental activities of Christianity must not suffer because of the unusual strain of war conditions. Strength here must be preserved and increased if the churches are to meet the imperative needs that will exist when the war is over.

II. That the widest possible publicity be given by the religious and secular press to this statement concerning the meeting and purposes of the Congress.

III. That the proceedings of the Congress containing the reports of the Commissions be placed in every community of our land. No Christian in the United States should be without the knowledge of the ideals and methods of work presented in the reports.

IV. That the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America issue to such organizations as may desire them reprints of reports, at the expense of those organizations.

V. That all communities that can form federations do so, and if there is financial ability employ executive secretaries who shall seek to promote the ideals of federation herein stated. If financial conditions do not permit salaried executive secretaries we advise that federation affairs be administered by councils composed of representatives of all participating churches, through administrative committees of a few carefully selected and competent men.

VI. That state federations be formed, wherever they do not now exist, and that they, and strong city or town federations, shall seek to promote the participation of the churches of all communities in the ideals of federation.

VII. That in communities where there are as few as only two churches, these give expression to their sense of loyalty to Jesus Christ by their united interest in the spiritual welfare of their neighborhood and of our country. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name"—unto the realization of my nature in its fellowship with God, and its redemptive service to men—"there am I in the midst of them." The presence of Jesus is here socially conditioned upon our participation with others in aspiration to share his spirit. This is as true of unions of Christian groups as of individual disciples. May there be throughout our land this gathering together, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that we may experience the abiding presence of the Christ who has promised to be with us always even unto the end.

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